



# Representative Jim Buck

*24th District*



*Serving Clallam • Jefferson • and Grays Harbor counties*

June 2005

## **Olympia Office:**

P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
360-786-7916

## **E-mail:**

buck.jim@leg.wa.gov

## **Rep. Buck's legislative homepage:**

<http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/buck.htm>

## **Committees:**

- Natural Resources, Ecology and Parks  
*Ranking Republican Member*
- Transportation

## **Resources on the Internet:**

**Access.wa.gov** – Provides access to state agency services, including applying for unemployment benefits, renewing your car tabs, and much more.

**Leg.wa.gov** – Offers committee meeting schedules and nearly everything else you want to know about the Legislature.

**SBA.gov and WSBDC.org** – Sites that provide help in starting or operating a small business.

*Dear Friends,*

*The 59th Washington Legislature concluded its 105-day session April 24 – a session that left many of us frustrated and deeply concerned about the “one-two punch” that was delivered to the taxpayers of Washington state. A budget that dramatically increases spending combined with a hike in the gas tax is a bitter pill for families, businesses and the state’s tenuous economic recovery.*

*We went into the session with the belief that it was not only possible but imperative that we forge a general fund budget **without tax hikes**. With discipline, focus, and the courage to act, we could have shaped a spending plan that ensures government lives within its means and provides the services citizens have a right to expect. Our arguments were not heard, and after passage of a Senate bill that gutted Initiative 601 – which cleared the way for half a billion dollars in tax hikes – we were left with a budget that increases spending by over 12 percent.*

*This newsletter is my report to you about how we dealt with these and other issues this session, and includes information on how we can keep in touch during the interim. Even though the legislative session has concluded, I am always glad to hear from you. If you have questions or other concerns to share with me, please call, send an e-mail or write a letter. I welcome your ideas and opinions.*

*Thank you for the honor of serving you in Olympia.*

*Sincerely,*

Jim Buck  
State Representative



# 2005 Session Review



# Rep. Jim Buck • *Serving the 24th District*

## Budget overspends, requires huge tax increases

At **\$26.1 billion**, not only does the two-year operating budget raise the level of spending higher than any previous proposal, but it requires nearly \$500 million in tax increases and \$233 million in one-time budget shifts, such as delaying state pension payments and taking funds from the Health Services Account that helps low-income families, seniors and children who rely on the state for health care assistance.



In addition to the sheer size of the budget, what also concerned me was the fact that it was created in virtual secrecy. This was a dramatic departure from the collaborative process of two years ago which produced a bipartisan agreement that increased spending by 2 percent – the slowest rate of growth in 40 years – and without raising taxes. The success of the 2003 budget helped put the state back on the road to economic recovery and revenue has grown by \$1.7 billion dollars. That would have allowed a **7 percent spending increase** in the next biennium without raising a single nickel in new taxes. Instead, budget writers increased spending by **12.4 percent**.

Under this budget, the state tax on cigarettes was increased by 60 cents a pack (up 42 percent), liquor taxes were hiked by \$1.33 a liter (up 35 percent), and there's a new sales tax on warranties.

The death tax – which was struck down by the state Supreme Court this year – has also returned. The tax would apply to estates of \$1.5 million or more this year and more than \$2 million next year. We don't believe that death ought to be a taxable event. Just because you can't take it with you doesn't mean the government should have it.

I was equally troubled that the budget relies on breaking the terms of **Initiative 601** – the state spending limit law approved by voters in 1993. The majority party pushed through a bill that dismantled I-601 and allowed the Legislature to raise taxes with a simple-majority vote instead of a two-thirds supermajority.

Initiative 601 was enacted to protect citizens against budgets like this. At a time when we are working to rebuild public trust in government, gutting I-601 undermines people's confidence.

I joined my 42 House Republican colleagues in voting **no** on this unsustainable budget, but the majority party voted **yes**, and the people of Washington are left to foot the bill.

## Gas-tax hike delivers a one-two punch

I also opposed the 9.5-cent gas tax increase, which will hike the state gas tax to 37.5 cents by July 1, 2008. Currently 28 cents a gallon, the tax will go up 3 cents in July, another 3 cents next year, 2 cents per gallon in 2007 and 1.5 cents in 2008.



The new transportation package also includes new fees on cars and passenger trucks (car tabs will go up between \$10 and \$30 a year depending on the weight of the vehicle) and annual motor home fees will increase from the current \$30 to \$105. The budget also raises the costs of driver's licenses (reinstatement fees rise to \$75 from the current \$20).

**Much of the 16-year proposal will be directed toward "mega-projects" in the greater Seattle area, including Seattle's Alaskan Way viaduct (\$2 billion), the 520 floating bridge across Lake Washington (\$500 million), and improvements on Interstates 90 (\$435 million) and 405 (\$972 million).**

The record increase in the gas tax hits at a time when many people in our district are struggling to make ends meet. This makes it tougher for them – coming as it does on the heels of the 5-cent-a-gallon boost adopted in 2003.

Our district is about the size of Delaware, largely rural, and many residents have to drive long distances to get from one place to another. With prices at the pump hitting record highs, the gas tax increase hurts. Add in the new weight fees on cars and trucks and SUVs, and in good conscience, I could not support the package.

## Governor signs Buck hydraulics bill



On April 22, the governor took final action on **HB 1346**, which updates and streamlines the state's hydraulic project approval (HPA) process. As the prime sponsor, the bill-signing culminated three years of work to clarify Washington's 1949 hydraulics code, which governs work done in natural streams.

The new law makes the hydraulic code's existing language more understandable, which will make it easier to maneuver through the general-permitting process.

A key element of the measure is a clause that allows emergency work in state marine and fresh waters to proceed without an HPA permit in the event of urgent situations, such as rockslides that block a stream, repair of damaged existing structures, or to protect property threatened by a stream or a change in the stream flow.

Confusion about HPA requirements created obstacles to emergency repair work on the flooding Hoh River. By the time crews and the Department of Fish and Wildlife had interpreted regulations and completed paperwork, part of a roadway washed away along the upper Hoh.

# 2005 Session Review



## Governor to select transportation chief

A Senate bill (**ESB 5513**) was signed into law May 9 that diminishes the powers of the state Transportation Commission and allows the governor to appoint the transportation secretary, with confirmation by the Senate.

The strongest argument for the change was the jarring decision by the Department of Transportation to abandon the Hood Canal graving dock project on the Port Angeles waterfront – a decision that was made without consulting state lawmakers.

The pullout decision, and the way it was made, illustrates the need for accountability from the multi-billion dollar agency, legislative oversight and greater gubernatorial control.



During a meeting with the transportation commission Feb. 16, I made clear that I found unacceptable the members' "dismissive" attitude toward the role local

jurisdictions and state legislators ought to have had in the graving yard decision.

Giving the governor the power to appoint the secretary was a top priority of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation. We believe the change will fix a system in which there is no accountability from the top of the department.

Our hopes of resolving the controversy over the graving yard reached an apparent impasse in April. The Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe said resuming work at the site where the ancient village of Tse-whit-zen was unearthed is not negotiable. We are continuing our efforts to find an alternative to the Department of Transportation's decision to walk away from a nearly \$60 million investment.

*During a recess in the House chambers, Rep. Buck reviews legislation scheduled for that evening's floor debate.*

## Capital budget provides funding for 24th District projects

A bright spot in an otherwise grim budget year was the 2005-2007 state construction budget, which earmarks \$67.8 million for projects and facilities in the 24th District.

The capital budget covers costs for construction and maintenance of state buildings, public schools, colleges and universities, parks and green space, and acquisition of threatened lands.

I was particularly pleased that the budget includes \$22.4 million to replace the Science and Technology Building at Peninsula College. Additional appropriations are provided for library renovation at the college (\$14 million), and \$250,000 for the Cultural and Arts Center.

The North Peninsula area also will be the recipient of significant construction activity, with renovations at the Clallam Bay Corrections Center totaling \$8.4 million.

These are important investments in our communities, create good family-wage jobs, and will give our district a much-needed economic boost.



## Buck bill to help prevent theft of specialty wood becomes law

There is an increasing problem with theft of prime fine-grained wood, much of which is used in the production of high-end stringed musical instruments and ornamental boxes. In addition to stealing from private property, thieves also have stripped specialty wood from public lands, including riparian zones and parks.



Woodworkers place a particular premium on western red cedar, Englemann and Sitka spruce, bigleaf maple and western red alder, all of which are protected under **SHB 1406**, which I sponsored to clamp down on theft and ensure that harvested wood has a "pedigree." The new law sets stricter permitting requirements for the harvest, transport and sale of specialty wood products, and penalties for illegal cutting and possession.

The bill authorizes law enforcement officers to seize equipment and vehicles used for illegally harvesting, possessing or transporting specialized forest products.

## Remember, I'm here to serve you as well as represent you

Although the Legislature won't reconvene until January, my responsibilities as your state representative continue year around. Please take the time to call or write whenever you have a question, concern or an idea to share. I also want to know if you have a problem dealing with state government. My legislative assistant and I are always ready to do everything we can to help.



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## Modest progress toward achieving true election reform

We came into the session hoping to restore public confidence in elections, but reform proved to be one of the year's most contentious issues. In the end, we passed improved voter registration and election procedures, but we fell short of adopting more meaningful election-law safeguards, including proof of citizenship and a cleanup of voter registration rolls. A push to move the primary to an earlier date also failed.

Among the improvements to the state's elections laws:

- Requiring provisional and absentee ballots to be visually distinguishable from poll ballots and not countable at poll-site counting machines.
- Requiring returned ballot envelopes to be kept in secure locations until opening.
- Prohibiting marking on ballots (to "enhance" them).
- Extending the general election certification period to 21 days (from 15) to provide more time for military and overseas ballots to arrive.
- Requiring that prospective voters sign that they are eligible (U.S. citizens and at least 18 years of age) and understand that they will be reported to authorities if they vote illegally.



- Requiring voter rolls to be checked against law enforcement and court databases to identify felons.

**Several other reforms demanded by citizens – including one that would require photo identification at the polls – still need our attention. Failure to pass the photo ID provision was particularly perplexing because it was something the public has demanded and was supported by the governor and the secretary of state.**

We didn't accomplish as much as we had hoped toward improving voter trust and the integrity of elections in our state, and there's still more work to be done, but we moved closer to achieving the reforms citizens want.

## Fisheries buyback signed into law

A measure extending the buyback program for the state's sea-urchin and sea-cucumber fisheries was signed by the governor April 21. My bill (**HB 1958**) continues the program, which was due to expire on Dec. 31 of this year, to Dec. 31, 2010.

Because of over-fishing concerns, the Legislature ordered the commercial sea-urchin and sea-cucumber fisheries closed in 2000. Along with the closure, an industry-funded program was set up to buy back, or retire, licenses that had been issued to harvesters prior to 1999. The buyback program has helped reduce the fleet, protect the resource, and allow the fisheries to continue to be economically viable. It's a proven program that deserves to be reauthorized.

**Making  
Your Voice Heard  
in Olympia!**

## Jim Buck *State Representative*

(360) 786-7916 • E-mail: [buck.jim@leg.wa.gov](mailto:buck.jim@leg.wa.gov)

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

TTY (Hearing-impaired Hotline): 1-800-635-9993

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Olympia, Washington 98504-0600  
P.O. Box 40600

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